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ABSTRACT

This paper presents some early findings from an ongoing study of teachers involved in a self-directed professional development plan. The four teacher participants discussed their past and present experiences with the self-directed professional development approach. The reflections of these teachers on the professional development experience and their expression of their perceptions, along with the "hearing" of the researchers (school principal) serve as the interpretative mechanism through which the lived experience is derived. Two conversations with each teacher were taped and transcribed, and two group interviews were held. Themes that have emerged to date are: (1) the importance of lived space; (2) the "click" of places found; (3) ownership of teacher development; (4) experience of the "lived other"; (5) a sense of investment; and (6) the significance of the interaction between teacher and administrator. (Contains 19 references.) (SLD)

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SEEKING SIGNIFICANCE: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TEACHERS USING PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

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SEEKING SIGNIFICANCE: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TEACHERS USING PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

What is it like to be a teacher who chooses a self-directed mode of supervision as a means to professional growth? In this study the researcher invited four teachers into conversation about their past and present experiences with a self-directed professional development model. Using hermeneutic phenomenology as the research methodology the participants have embarked on a journey to explore and dwell in the landscape of their own professional development in search of themes that illuminate the significance of their being as teachers.

It should be stated at the outset that this study is a research project in progress. As such this paper reports on how the methodology has laid open the phenomenon and shares interpretations of themes that have been brought forward to date.

Philosophical Orientation and Research Methodology

One's orientation toward the research question determines the methodology which can best inform the inquiry. Or, as van Manen (1990) expresses it, "A research method is only a way of investigating certain kinds of questions. The questions themselves and the way one understands the questions are the important starting points, not the method as such" (p. 1).

In my role as a principal I have the opportunity to interview prospective teachers. Most often these teacher candidates are freshly degreed and certified, young and enthusiastic. In response to my question, "Why did you decide to be a teacher?" they will frequently tell a tale of "playing school" as a child. They recount all of the behaviors commonly associated with the role -- lining up desks and chairs in rows, writing on a blackboard with chalk, "teacher talk," and so forth -- intending to share their belief that they have "always wanted to be a teacher." From where have these notions of "being a teacher" come? Do these behaviors alone, certainly within the reality of "being a teacher,"

adequately describe what the experience is like?

When I have had the additional opportunity to follow-up with those who become teachers, the conversation often takes a turn to those aspects of the reality -- the everydayness -- of being a teacher that only the experience itself can reveal. Sometimes the illumination of what it is like to be a teacher is exciting and very positive, potentially more fulfilling than the individual may have anticipated. In other cases the individual is disappointed by what has been revealed. Discussions prefaced with, "If I had known it was going to be like this..." in time lead to searches for alternatives to "being a teacher."

How do we understand the discrepancy between that which is known about a particular way of being and that which is hidden? How do we frame the attempt to understand? Is it the *understanding* itself -- understanding our everyday being-in-the-world -- which is the intent of looking through the lens of phenomenology at our ways of being? What is this lens called "phenomenology?" As an occulist grinds glass to give each lens its shape -- to ultimately shape one's vision -- so does philosophy shape one's conception of phenomenology. My conception of phenomenology is grounded in the work of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger.

Heidegger's (1962) discussion of phenomenology follows "the clue offered by the term 'phenomenology.' Phenomenology means the investigation of the 'logos' of the 'phenomenon'" (Macann, 1993, p. 66). A brief review of this line of thought and its application to my orienting question are in order.

"To the Things Themselves!"

In his treatise Being and Time, Heidegger (1962) discusses his conception of phenomenology as an investigative method.

> With the question of the meaning of Being, our investigation comes up against the fundamental question of philosophy. This is one which must be treated *phenomenologically*. Thus our treatise does not subscribe to a 'standpoint' or represent any special 'direction'; for phenomenology is nothing of either sort, nor can it become so as long as it understands itself. The expression 'phenomenology' signifies primarily a *methodological conception*. This expression does not characterize the what of the objects of

> philosophical research as subject-matter, but rather the *how* of that research. . . .Thus the term 'phenomenology' expresses a maxim which can be formulated as 'To the things themselves!' (pp. 49-50)

Pursuing this line of thought, Heidegger's (1962) conception of phenomenology diverges from that of earlier philosophers, particularly Husserl. As interpreted by Dreyfus (1995):

> . . .Heidegger asks, What should someone do who wants to investigate being? His answer is phenomenology. And what is phenomenology? In answering, Heidegger succeeds in taking over Husserl's definition of phenomenology and totally transforming it for his own ends, making "phenomenology" mean exactly the opposite of Husserl's proposed method for spelling out the intentional contents of his own belief system and thereby arriving at indubitable evidence. In Heidegger's hands, phenomenology becomes a way of letting something shared that can never be totally articulated and for which there can be no indubitable evidence show itself. (p. 30)

The "things" of professional development plans. When I talk to my teachers about self-directed professional development plans, we discuss the mechanics of "doing" them -- the criteria they and I must satisfy for the plans to be what my school district's framework intends. These are the "things," lying at the surface, that address the typical teacher's questions. After all, inherent in "doing" a self-directed professional development plan is the belief that there is a connection between the "doing" and evaluation. "Doing it right" leads to a satisfactory evaluation.

This narrow view, limited to those elements of the phenomenon of working with a professional development plan that are visible through a superficial encounter with the phenomenon, is reminiscent of Heidegger's (1962) etymology of the term "phenomenon." In its ordinary conception:

> The Greek expression *phaenomen*, to which the term 'phenomenon' goes back....means that which shows itself, the manifest. (p. 51)

As explained further by Dreyfus (1995):

> The phenomenon in its ordinary conception is what shows itself directly, as when we say that natural science studies natural phenomena. (p. 30)

Professional development plans "themselves". Understanding the teachers' lived experiences of doing a professional development plan thus requires movement beyond this ordinary conception of "phenomenon."

> That which already shows itself in the appearance as prior to the "phenomenon" as ordinarily understood and as accompanying it in every case, can, even though it thus shows itself unthematically, be brought thematically to show itself; and what thus shows itself in itself...will be the "phenomena" of phenomenology. (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 54-55)

This study has sought not only to understand the "things" of professional development plans but the "things themselves" -- that is, those aspects of the phenomenon which, appropriately interpreted, speak to its uniqueness, its essence.

Logos: The Discourse

The -ology of phenomenology has its roots in the Greek word *logos*. Typically, this word is taken to mean "science" or "the study of" this or that. For Heidegger (1962), and for a clearer understanding of phenomenology as method, a more primordial meaning of logos is necessary. For him, the term "discourse" has more functionality.

> *Logos* as "discourse" means...to make manifest what one is 'talking about' in one's discourse....The *logos* lets something be seen, namely, what the discourse is about; and it does so either *for* the one who is doing the talking (the *medium*) or for persons who are talking with one another, as the case may be. Discourse 'lets something be seen'...: that is, it lets us see something from the very thing which the discourse is about. In discourse, in so far as it is genuine, *what* is said...is drawn *from* what the talk is about, so that discursive communication, in what it says...,makes manifest what it is talking about, and thus makes this accessible to the other party. (Heidegger, 1962, p. 56)

As shared above, teachers' work with professional development plans does not typically bring them -- or me -- to this level of understanding the phenomenon. Engaging teachers in "discourse," as Heidegger (1962) conceives, makes it possible to let "something be seen in its *togetherness* with something -- letting it be seen *as* something" (p. 56). With the "something" being professional development plans, it seems clear that talking with teachers about professional development plans *as* professional development plans is the means for understanding beyond the superficial level presented by the mechanics of "doing" them and into the affective realm that contributes to their significance.

But, as Dreyfus (1995) points out:

> Remember, there are no interpretation-free facts for the phenomenologist to describe, neither objective facts nor subjective ones like a system of beliefs, so the phenomenologist must interpret and organize the phenomena to reveal the understanding of being in which he already dwells, which lets anything show up *as* anything. (p. 31)

This interpretive nature of phenomenology is what makes the method hermeneutic.

"In effect," says Palmer (1969), "hermeneutics becomes an ontology of understanding and interpretation" (p. 130). Thus, research which has a hermeneutic phenomenological orientation is both descriptive and interpretive. It is descriptive by virtue of its focus upon how things appear from what they say about themselves; interpretive by its interest in deriving understanding from the "lived experience" of the phenomenon as "captured in language" (van Manen, 1990, p. 181).

In this study, four teachers were invited to reflect upon their lived experience in working with professional development plans -- to describe the everyday experience by how the experience reveals itself to them. Their reflection on the experience and their expression of it through language, and my "hearing" their voice have served as the interpretive mechanisms through which an understanding of the lived experience can be derived.

Selection was based upon their willingness to engage in the discourse through reflection, conversation with me and other participants, and their willingness to maintain their involvement through an entire semester. They each also either have had or currently are engaged in the experience of working with a self-directed professional development plan.

To date, two conversations with each teacher have been taped and transcribed. Two group interviews have also occurred. In the latter the conversational focus has been upon common themes that emerged through other aspects of the discourse.

In his classic work *Truth and Method* (1960), Gadamer attached hermeneutics to linguistics. "Hermeneutics is an encounter with Being [-in-the-world] through language" (Palmer, 1969, p. 42). "World" is, in Gadamer's view, the understanding that is shared

between persons; language is the medium through which the nature of one's world becomes known (p. 206).

In addition, the teachers and I have conducted dialogue through protocol writing. "Protocol writing is the generating of original texts on which the researcher can work" (van Manen, 1990, p. 63). This work began with a writing prompt designed to stimulate their reflective thinking. Dialogue journals and subsequent prompts focused on themes revealed through their written reflections and interviews have stimulated the on-going creation of text.

The quest for understanding a phenomenon in one's "world," then, is a dynamic interaction between researcher and phenomenon. That it is a "quest" suggests that the researcher initiates the interaction through the asking of questions. The "understanding" unfolds as the "hearing" of each response is interpreted. Question leads to response leads to question to response again in a somewhat circular manner. The on-going inquiry probes more deeply as the meanings ascribed to the parts and to the whole of the hermeneutic circle are revealed through their interconnections.

Methodology

Conducting this sort of research requires the researcher to determine the nature of the phenomenon as it is experienced. Techniques and procedures are not presupposed. But this does not mean that there are not guidelines to be followed. Rather, van Manen (1990) points to the traditions of hermeneutics and phenomenological scholarship as the source to suggest six methodological themes which serve as guides to this research form. Thus:

> Reduced to its elemental methodological structure, hermeneutic phenomenological research may be seen as a dynamic interplay among six research activities:
>
> (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
> (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
> (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;

(4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
(5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and
(6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

Though these foregoing elements of methodical structure have been listed as separate activities, the doing of the research is characterized by an interplay of the research activities. The progress of this particular study will be brought forward as the interplay is revealed.

Turning to the Phenomenon

> Every project of phenomenological inquiry is driven by a commitment of turning to an abiding concern....So, phenomenological research is a being-given-over to some quest, a true task, a deep questioning of something that restores an original sense of what it means to be a thinker, a researcher, a theorist....It is always a project of someone: a real person who in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence. (van Manen, 1990, p. 31)

For me, this "being-given-over" has centered on an aspect of supervision -- professional development plans -- that had been outside my experience until encountered as a supervisor. Having witnessed the impact of this form of supervision on my teachers' perceptions of their being teachers -- through their outward projection of the role -- I began to question how my experience of being a teacher might have been different had I had a similar opportunity.

According to Tradition

I had been observed by my principal twice during my first year of teaching. Aside from the initial surprise at the form and substance of these observations, I regarded this aspect of professional life as an event to be expected. I believed the process was one intended to provide both affirmation of what I did well as a teacher and an opportunity for constructive criticism of those aspects of my teaching which needed to be improved.

Subsequent observations throughout my career in teaching, conducted by a series

of principals, followed a pattern which became all too familiar for the discrepancy between their purported intention and their reality.

Silly little boxes. Inherent in this experience was a developing tension between what are generally regarded as two separate but interrelated functions of administration -- supervision and evaluation. "Supervision is the function in schools that draws together the discrete elements of instructional effectiveness into whole-school action" (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1995, p. 5). Evaluation, on the other hand, is the process of making judgments, and is of two types.

> *Formative evaluation* is intended to improve a program. It is carried out while the program is in progress and can be on-going throughout the life of the program. *Summative evaluation* results in a definite judgment about the value of a program. It is carried out after a program has been in existence for a period of time. A summative evaluation is usually the basis for a decision about whether the program will continue, undergo major revisions or be terminated. (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1995, p. 265)

Which of these phenomena could properly name my experience? What I had expected was supervision and formative evaluation. Is that what I received? I recall sitting in my principal's office following an observation and feeling the weight of the checklists as Howard (1992) describes so well below:

> His checklist lights his way into my world, but I am not sure he really sees me. His boxes and numbers are already there to say something about me. I feel that I must perform in relevance to those silly little boxes. Is that how I am to be measured, by check marks in a box? (p. 154)

During these conferences my principal shared his assessment of my performance by means of a "checklist of observed behaviors." I was instructed to review the document, ask any questions that might occur to me, and sign the document to indicate that I had been given the opportunity to discuss it. Appearing behind each item on the checklist was a handwritten "S" to signify that he had indeed observed "satisfactory" performance. There would be no questions, and little discussion. It was clear to both of us that I had done my job, as defined by this checklist, and I had been "rated" as satisfactory.

Does this scenario ring true for other teachers in other contexts? Have others

shared my experience? Is the ringing as hollow sounding for them as it came to be for me? I remember coming away from those conferences with a sense of well-being that I had "made the grade." I have kept copies of these forms as part of my professional file, proof that I had done well.

> Sometimes we get numbers, ones, twos, or threes. For figure skaters those numbers might mean something, 5.7 for technique, 5.9 for artistic merit. But for me numbers just don't work. They say nothing about me or what I can do. Reducing me to a number or a grade on a checklist is not who I am. (Howard, 1992, p. 156)

Looking within the boxes. In conducting this study I have returned to my file to reflect upon it in the context of what I am now questioning. I see that the characteristics for which I received a rating are collected into three categories: Characterization (A description or representation of a person's qualities or peculiarities); Professionalism (Of or related to professional status, character, or standards); and Pedagogics (Pertaining to the art of teaching). I wonder: What had I learned from the experience of being rated that would have helped me be a better teacher? How meaningful are the ratings in each category?

Of twenty-three characteristics, only eleven pertain to "the art of teaching," or pedagogics. I had over fifteen years of classroom experience with this particular school district, and those eleven categories were consistently rated as satisfactory! Certainly, a novice does not know everything about the art! Where were the suggestions for growth? Indeed, what proof is there that I had grown at all over those many years? In what manner had I been supervised? What had my principal learned in one visit -- or for that matter fifteen years of once-per-year visits -- about my being a teacher that could inform this assessment? Did my principal really know *me*? Indeed, what had *I* learned from these supervisory encounters about my "being" as a teacher? To what extent had *I* come to really know me? I conclude that the ultimate object of those classroom visits was to gather data for summative evaluations of my role as teacher, with accountability being a primary goal. But what kind of accountability? Sergiovanni and Starratt (1983) distinguish between two kinds:

> Professional accountability is growth-oriented and implies a commitment to consistent improvement. Occupational accountability is not growth-oriented at all, but merely seeks to meet some predetermined standard. Presumably, once this standard is met -- that is, once the teacher is judged to meet minimum standards of "satisfactory" teaching -- the teacher's growth obligations cease. (p. 293)

In my own case, I felt obligated to hear the criticism. Framed as a "suggestion," the criticism implied no call to action, no obligation to adjust or to grow. Without on-going supervision to light the way, suggestions recede into the dark shadows of my doubting mind leading me to wonder: How do I rate?

What lies beyond the boxes? Today I am a principal with responsibility for supervising and evaluating forty-five teachers. The question, "How do I rate?" takes on new significance but is laden with the same concerns. Though there are conventions which must be followed I am concerned about the meanings my teachers derive from my supervision. How can I prevent the hollowness of my early experiences from being their experiences, too? What would the essence of their experiences be if my primary focus was on their professional growth and professional accountability rather than the generation of a rating? Indeed, how might those personal experiences be enhanced, from a professional development perspective, if the teachers were empowered to exercise a greater degree of control over the nature and substance of supervision? Can supervision be something other than the tradition I had experienced? Can it be -- should it be -- something other than what I have offered to my teachers?

An Alternative

My school district recently transformed its supervisory practice into a differentiated model. According to this plan, tenured teachers who have maintained satisfactory ratings may elect to design a Personal Professional Development Plan that focuses upon some instructional or curricular concern deemed significant to the individual. Teachers who engage in this self-directed option must develop goals, action plans, and means for assessing their experience. In its intent, this professional development plan represents a

shift

> .... toward a more teacher-centered supervisory process that focuses on the need to help teachers become more reflective about their teaching .... In this paradigm .... the critical task of the supervisor is to help teachers more successfully engage in reflective behavior, which is thought to be a necessary element of professionalism .... while fostering critical inquiry about teaching and learning, increasing the teacher's understanding of teaching practice, and broadening and deepening the repertoire of images and metaphors that the teacher can call upon to deal with problems. (Siens & Ebmeier, 1996, pp. 303-304)

But, what is the reality of this professional development paradigm? For me, the reality is perceived through the lens of "supervisor." But this is intended as a teacher -centered approach. It would seem, therefore, that any professional development derived from the experience is significant only insofar as it is meaningful to teachers. Would it not be more appropriate, then, to view the experience through the teacher lens? Hearing the voice of Gadamer (1997) once again:

> . . .the value and importance of research cannot be measured by a criterion based in the subject matter. Rather, the subject matter appears truly significant only when it is properly portrayed for us. Thus . . . the subject matter . . . acquires its life only from the light in which it is presented to us. We accept the fact that the subject presents different aspects of itself at different times or from different standpoints. We accept the fact that these aspects do not simply cancel one another out as research proceeds, but are like mutually exclusive conditions that exist by themselves and combine only in us. Our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard. (p. 284)

In the realm of research on supervision the voice of teachers has often been silent. What they "see" and can give voice to has been restricted by blinders of one sort or other. How can we strip away the blinders? Is it possible that opportunities to become immersed in supervisory practices more responsive to individual developmental needs will open the view and reveal opportunities for teacher voices to be heard? Do they understand what they see? Do they know what to say in response? Are their perspectives different in any substantive way from what they have been? What significance do they derive from the experience? **What, in sum, is it like to be a teacher using a professional development plan as the basis for supervision?**

Exploring the Phenomenon

As is the case with most explorations, this journey has been guided by signposts that have named a place or steered the investigation in a particular direction. The interpretation of signposts encountered to date are shared both as examples of how the research is conducted and as understandings that have been revealed.

Tension: Supervision versus Evaluation

Much of what has served as the foundation for my turning to the questions surrounding professional development are embodiments of my preunderstandings of the relationship between supervision and evaluation. Coming to grips with this relationship represented the first hill to be climbed on the journey, and the point of embarkation was the issue of rating. It has been the tie that has bound the processes of supervision and evaluation together in teachers' thinking.

What does it mean to be rated? Regardless of the supervision/evaluation paradigm being used, a key outcome is the perception that is generated regarding the quality of teaching that is offered by teachers. Most teachers receive a rating of one sort or other that, in effect, categorizes their work in relationship to some standard of performance. But, what do these ratings mean to those who receive them? How do teachers respond to them? An etymological analysis of the term may shed some light.

Signpost: Valuing. The meaning of valuing suggests "to estimate quality, worth or value of something with respect to another; or to appraise" (Webster's, 1989, p. 1303). These terms and phrases immediately come to light as we attempt to illuminate the meaning of "rating." When viewed in this manner, teacher ratings become the means by which the teacher's ways of "being a teacher" are appraised by others to determine the relative value of their work. We are categorized as "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory" in accordance with a set of standards that seeks to objectify, but which must be subjective because of the humanness of both "raters" and "rated." How reliable are the ratings? How can we be sure that the feedback we are given provides an accurate picture of reality? Are the same

standards applied to all who are rated? Are there hidden agendas that creep into the objectivity of the one who conducts the rating?

Signpost: Counting. What does it mean to "count?" In this sense it refers to "being considered," to "be taken into account." If the person who is being (or whose being is?) rated is "highly considered," does the meaning expand to include the notion of "esteem?" It would appear so. But do the rating paradigms to which teachers are subjected carry this intent? Are their lived experiences testaments to this meaning? Recall Howard's (1992) concern at being reduced "...to a number or a grade on a checklist" (p. 156).

Why are these two meanings of "rate" most prominent in our minds when those of us who face "ratings" experience heightened anxiety or fear over them? Each meaning became a part of our language during the 15th century. It is interesting to note the similarity between the feelings some have expressed over "ratings" and another meaning of the term that had become a part of the language a century earlier.

Signpost: Reproving. Coming from the Middle English *raten*, to be "rated" meant that a person was "scolded," "criticized," or "rebuked." "Reproving," from the same period (*reproven*) carries with it a "kindly intent." But the overall intent is clear -- to be "rated" has a negative connotation. Could it be that our anxiety, fear and distrust of rating paradigms, and those who do the rating, are carryovers from so long ago? How might a supervisor allay this sort of anxiety?

"Reliability," "consistent standards," "hidden agendas," "criticized," "taken into account" . . . What questions do terms such as these bring forth? As teachers, do we question the ability of others to assess what we do? Or, is the concern one which has more to do with the supervisor's ability to assess the whole "being" of teachers and their "being with" students? The question speaks to that which is observable -- quantifiable -- its focus often on technique applied according to some pre-selected criteria versus efforts to inform us of the nature of the lived experience that is shared between teachers and students -- that which sets apart the technician from the artist.

Bryant and Currin (1995), in their study of expert and novice evaluators, supply a basis for reflection through their application to the educational setting of Simon's (1945) bounded rationality strategy for decision making:

> Because teaching is complex, supervisors who analyze teaching rely on schemata, or mental frameworks, that ignore some data while including other data . . . . The human mind develops schemata, or filters, to cope with an abundance of information. The result is a schematic selection of data based on the shape of one's filter or schemata. Teacher evaluators are assumed to operate with filters. They use a mental structure to cope with and process the huge amount of data present in any classroom observation. (p. 252)

What forces shape these schemata? In their study examining the perspectives of teachers regarding supervision, Zepeda and Ponticell (1998) categorize perceptions as either supervision at its best or supervision at its worst. Among the teacher comments were these:

> I did the show, and when it was over I waited the required number of days and made an appointment to see how I scored. I scored as high as possible, but the score had little to do with the learning that went on in the classroom. I had certainly jammed all of the required skills into the lesson in order to hit every area on the instrument, but when my students returned to use the content taught that day, their understanding was not there. (p. 78)

Another commented:

> I decided it was time to show how I really conduct a class -- cooperative groups, teacher facilitating student self-direction and evaluation, and all. My principal rated this lesson very low; she said a "perfect class" following the required indicators was much easier for her to evaluate. The next time she expected me to "join the family" and teach "the real lesson." I felt humiliated, but I learned to deliver the appropriate show. (p. 78)

Principals, supervisors, and teachers in my school district have received training in Hunter's (1973, 1976) Essential Elements of Instruction model. The classroom observation process has traditionally focused upon the presence or absence of these "elements of effective instruction." The district has thereby shared a view of instruction which it values. These are the things I look for because they need to be reflected in my observation reports. How is this schemata perceived by my teachers? What significance do they attach to, or derive from, this supervisory platform? Teachers in the Zepeda and

Ponticell (1998) study perceived the supervisor as "focused solely on the checklist indicators; the higher the score on the instrument, the more 'perfect' the lesson" (p. 78). These are the things teachers attempt to highlight in their instructional practice. As pointed out by Denise, a fifth grade teacher:

> I would go over my lesson piece by piece to make sure that I had everything in there that I was supposed to have according to Madeline Hunter . . . . I wanted to prove to you that I knew what I was doing, and that I was good in the classroom.

Had I in some way given her reason to believe otherwise? Consider another piece of the same conversation. "I felt like you were looking for certain things in my lesson . . . I was determined that I was going to give you what I thought you wanted" (Denise). What *I* wanted? Is she referring strictly to the overt standards? Or, could she also be indicating a belief that my own values find expression in my supervision? I recall the notion of a supervisory platform (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1983) and wonder how thorough I have been in developing such a schemata.

Fuller's (1969) research on concerns of teachers at various stages of their careers classifies concern with self as characteristic of those in an early phase of teaching. New teachers, in asking themselves questions such as "Where do I stand?" and "What is the hidden agenda?" are actually ". . .trying to discover the parameters of the school situation" (p. 220). As she continues to explain, some light is shed upon Denise's experience:

> It seemed to us that teachers who continued to be uncertain about these parameters were "stuck." Their concerns about where they stood might abate even if they discovered that they were not wanted or that they had little authority. What did get them "stuck" was continuing in a state of uncertainty. (p. 220)

Was Denise guessing as to what my values and beliefs are? Do they correspond with her own? She has given voice to a concern characteristic of early phase teachers despite her years of experience. Has her experience with supervision caused her to become "stuck?" "I felt like I was putting on a show for you. And then you left the classroom, and everything went back to normal" (Denise). Is her "normal" different in any significant way

from what the school district and her supervisor value? How well have I communicated my values and beliefs to her and to others? What have I done to eliminate uncertainty?

That these questions do not generate ready answers may well be the key to understanding the tension associated with rating as "valuing." Perhaps the tension is not so much a function of the rating behavior as it is a function of the perceived competition between what is valued by the major players in the drama: the school system, the supervisor and the teacher. Until recently, the teachers' schemata have not played a major role in determining the standards against which their teacher behavior is rated.

What is the meaning of the rating? So far I have examined the meanings associated with the act of rating. But, how do we understand the rating itself -- the number, grade or evaluative statement that serves to categorize and place value upon what teachers do? Howard (1992) finds the numbers to be meaningless. Maria, a sixth grade teacher, had similar feelings.

> Going through an observation every year is a formality; something to be done. . . .As far as the form is concerned, I found that to be very generic as far as rating is concerned. You are simply given a number. . . .To me it doesn't really tell a lot about my ability as a teacher.

Again I am struck by the similarity of our individual experiences and the inability to ascribe significance to either the process or the number. The process is performed in a perfunctory manner. "You get the score. You're satisfactory. Fine" (Maria). So what? is the implied question.

Signpost: Comparisons. Maria also expressed the theme of comparison and competition in her experience with rating and evaluation. "I don't want them [other teachers] to be compared to my performance, but even when you know that people are less than satisfactory and they are given a 'satisfactory' rating, I wonder, what's the whole point to a satisfactory rating?" In effect, do scores on teacher appraisal forms tend to become substitutes for "good teaching?"

Signpost: Bitterness. As I consider the theme of comparison and competition, I am reminded of those lines from Desiderata (Ehrmann, 1954):

> If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter;
> For always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. (p. 11)

When we compare objects we do so without interaction from the objects themselves. Their inanimate quality precludes them from reacting to our critique of their being. But, comparing individuals in roles that purport to be equal, subjects us to their reactions and interactions. One reaction is competition, covert in nature, but motivating nonetheless to one's interest in teaching in better ways.

I, too, made comparisons similar to those voiced by Maria. We call ourselves "colleagues," fellow workers in the same profession. To be a "colleague" implies collaboration -- working together to a common end. Is this a contradiction? How does one collaborate and compete at the same time? Is it the competition which is incongruous with being a member of the teaching profession?

Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon (1995) have drawn a distinction between formal evaluation and direct assistance that has been helpful in easing the tension between my perceptions of supervision and evaluation.

> Formal evaluation is performed to determine whether or not a teacher measures up to a standard of acceptable work -- that is, to sum up the value of the teacher. Direct assistance is concerned with helping a teacher assess and work on his or her own classroom needs -- that is, to form a focus for future improvement. (1995, p. 300)

Signpost: Forming a focus. What does it take to "form a focus?" The word focus is derived from the Latin *focus* meaning "fireplace" or "hearth" (Webster's, 1989, p. 478). A fireplace, or hearth, was a significant feature of homes, having been at the center of domestic activity. How similar the phrase "hearth and home" is to the phrase "heart and soul!" The hearth/heart is where the "fire" burns to warm the home/soul. Is it presumptuous to assert that, in the context of supervision, a staff development program based upon directed assistance could rekindle "the fire" in the heart of those who have

become complacent about formal evaluation? Do Professional Development Plans in my school district spark such a fire in those who have used them? Is that spark like the lightning which, emanating from the sky above the forest, sets the forest ablaze? Or, is it more like the "spark" of spontaneous combustion -- just the right combination of ingredients at the right time setting off a blaze from within? The experience of teachers seems to indicate that either could be true.

Denise credits her plan with having forced her to "keep up with current trends . . . where normally I might not have gotten involved. . . .I often discussed my topic with others who were also interested [in what I was doing]." Without the "lightning" of the professional development plan would she have experienced the "brush fire" of action research, or would that brush fire have spread to her colleagues?

Ron, a sixth grade teacher with an internal fire, is an example of spontaneous combustion. He expresses being "really pleased with what happened this year. . . .What I liked most about it was [the feeling] that what I was doing all those blessed nights . . . preparing lesson plans . . . really had some impact on what I was doing in the classroom." Ron is a veteran of more than twenty years of teaching -- and lesson planning. In my several years of working with him, I have never known him to <u>not</u> be well-planned. Yet, his comment reveals a time when he questioned the value of all that effort. Does his expression also reveal a disbelief in the connection between planning and effective lessons?

Dwelling on Ron's experience, I am struck by the similarity between the reaction of teachers in general to the perfunctory nature of formal observation and his own reaction to his lesson planning. As their careers unfold, do teachers experience a loss of focus? Like Ron, do they experience a dimming awareness of the connections between the act of making decisions (i.e., planning lessons) and the impact of those decisions? Do the multitude of responsibilities that define the role of "teacher" become disconnected to the point of losing the power -- the combustibility -- inherent in their connectedness? For Ron and others like him, all the ingredients are present. What is needed is something to rekindle

the awareness, something to start the combustion process.

Maria finds expression in a different analogy: "It's like I have this little present that I opened this year, and this little present has been with me all year . . . and I knew I was doing something that . . . was better for the kids. They were learning and I was learning at the same time." One can almost sense that the fire being described here is neither the forest fire nor the fire of spontaneous combustion, but the fire of the hearth -- that kind of fire which is purposefully generated and carefully nurtured to be shared by all whose souls are touched by its warmth.

Another definition of focus indicates "directed attention, or emphasis" (Webster's, 1989, p. 478). Perhaps this comes closer to the intended meaning. Directed assistance enables a teacher to emphasize, direct attention toward, needs specific to his/her situation.

Donald, a fifth grade teacher, states: I felt it [Professional Development Plan] was something that I wanted to do to improve my skills in working with at-risk students. . . .I want to learn what *I* (italics added) want to learn." As I recall Donald's work, he broadened his repertoire of strategies geared toward students with mild learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder. He has become more involved in the school's instructional support program and is generally regarded by his colleagues as one who has strategies to share that work. Would he have accomplished these things without the opportunity to focus on them in some formal way?

Ron also emphasized the significance of the personalized nature of Professional Development Plans. In response to a question about their appropriateness as a learning strategy for teachers, he states: "I set my goals and identify my needs. I then decide what I think I should be working on. . . . The fact that I have done this makes it more important to me." Returning to the prior discussion of his experience, is it possible that the advent of Professional Development Plans and their potential for "directing attention" brought those disconnected elements together for Ron in such a way as to ignite the fire of enthusiasm?

Focus also has a visual context denoting "a clear image" (Webster's, 1989, p. 478).

But, whose focused vision is it that controls the nature and substance of either supervision or evaluation? Those who supervise teachers are likely to have their perceptions shaped by the nature of their own lenses through which the work of teachers is viewed. Providing assistance to teachers filtered through a given perspective, often distanced and "out of focus" by the low frequency of contact, holds the potential for meaningfulness of the assistance to be diminished despite the best of intentions. Ross and Regan (1995), in their analysis of the dynamics between teachers, teacher consultants and principals, describe the absolute rejection by teachers and consultants alike of the feedback from principals for similar reasons. If the signpost is to direct our journey toward its desired destination -- toward understanding the lived experience of professional development plans -- then the journey must be focused upon the vision of the teachers.

Emerging Themes

As this research project progresses the analysis of text generated through the conversations and protocol writing samples of the participants reveals themes that, when explored, provide an interpretation of the phenomenon of working with self-directed professional development plans. Because the research has not been completed the following are offered as potential paths along which the inquiry may lead. Being sought is an understanding of the phenomenon in terms of what Van Manen (1990) refers to as "fundamental lifeworld themes" and that he identifies as "existentials" to distinguish them from the lived-experience themes of the particular phenomenon (p. 101). Thus, the "four fundamental existentials of spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality may be seen to belong to the existential ground by way of which all human beings experience the world..." (Van Manen, 1990, p. 102). How can we use an understanding of the existentials to better understand the lived experience of teachers? The following illustrates the manner in which themes from the teachers' experiences can be differentiated for study. It is also illustrative of the interconnectedness of the existentials.

Lived Space

Spatiality, a lived space, is "felt space." The physical spaces we occupy in our everyday being in the world evoke feelings that are difficult to articulate because the experience of being in those spaces is largely pre-verbal (Van Manen, 1990, p. 102). Reflection on those experiences enables us to put language to those feelings and brings forward meanings and understanding.

> In experience, the meaning of space often merges with that of place. "Space" is more abstract than "place." What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. (Tuan, 1997, p. 6)

Is the lived experience of their work with self-directed professional development plans a significant means through which teachers can define their place in the profession? One teacher views her work as "a mission" to build an atmosphere in her classroom that encourages students to enjoy reading, to be "at home" with the books they share. Another shares this feeling but expresses it as a desire to "create an atmosphere where they don't feel threatened to try things." To what extent have they found the opportunity for self-directed work to be a means for focusing upon approaches to their work that transforms the physical space of the classroom and the intellectual space of the curriculum into "felt space" for their students and for themselves?

The "click" of places found. Teachers' expressions of the place theme are powerful. They are at one time destinations, niches, and feelings of comfort and belonging.

Donna and Ellen voice their awareness of place in the coming together of praxis and student learning. For Donna it is the feeling that "it all just kind of clicks together." Ellen senses it as things "fallen into place." In both is found an expression of satisfaction that is the source of value added to the physical and intellectual space of the classroom.

Ownership. Explaining her reason for becoming involved with Professional Development Plans when they were first introduced, Ellen wrote, "I love the sense of

ownership they provide, along with the value they place on professional judgement and growth." What is that "sense of ownership?"

Educators frequently use the word to suggest a means of motivating students. We say that students will be more motivated to learn some content or to behave in some manner if they have developed a sense of ownership with respect to the manner of learning or the rules of appropriate conduct. I might say that through my experiences as a principal I have come to recognize the advantages of creating an atmosphere or sense of ownership among teachers in the process of making decisions. In both of these examples ownership is treated as an entity, something which can be developed or created. As such, can I own ownership as when we say "I have ownership" of something. What does it mean to own?

Going to the root of the term, on one level the word "own" means "belonging to oneself or itself" (Webster, 1989, p. 843). We might say that a teacher's personal professional development plan is her own. Because of its strong connection to self such plans may be perceived as a part of a teacher's being. Because it is her own -- a part of her being -- does the teacher define her being-as-a-teacher in terms of either the subject of the plan or the process of the plan?

"My first professional development plan was not one for which I volunteered. Several of us were called to the GCR [Guidance Conference Room] to discuss PDP's with our principal, and we were basically told what he wanted us to do" (Diane). What was Diane's sense of ownership during this first encounter with professional development plans? Who owned the project? She describes the work of shadowing selected 7th graders for a day to understand how they experienced a day at that school. She remembers very clearly the revelations that came to her out of that experience, and she remembers quite well the suggestions she made. She also remembers the response to her work. "I can remember being pleased with [these ideas] and pleased with my write up. However, I can remember being disappointed that I never heard back from the principal, especially since the topic of the study had been his original idea."

As I read this journal entry I feel the tension rising from the expansion and contraction of her lived space; from what she thought was meaningful work and her level of ownership -- her giving over to the work -- and the receiving of that work by her supervisor. From this tension emerges the question, how does teacher engagement in self-directed work affect the way teachers live in relation to others?

Lived Other

Relationality is "the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 104). The teachers in this study experience their lifeworld in relation to different sets of others. Yet, through their collective lived-experience have emerged themes that have become so much a part of the experience that they are defining characteristics of the phenomenon. Others are themes of hope and expectation; expressions of desired changes in the lived relation with others.

Investment. In the world of economics one lived relation is defined by the way in which resources are allocated. Hoarding resources makes them available for those who own or control them while preventing them from being used for the common good. On the other hand, investment opens the flow of resources and their use for more widespread benefit. The former tends to result in economic stagnation while the latter leads to economic growth.

The same dichotomy can be seen in the theme of ownership as it has been discussed above. On the one hand it evokes a "holding-on to" image and speaks to the possessive nature of one's relationship to his work. I can own my work much like I own my car or my home.

On the other hand, ownership can conjure an image of "giving to." For instance, Donna refers to ownership as the contribution others and she make to defining their school. Through self-directed professional development she has found others more willing to "go to other people, ask, share, as opposed to 'This is my stuff, I'm not letting it go'." She goes on to tell stories of teachers coming to her for advice as they plan to implement

strategies that have been the subjects of her professional development plans. The lived relation between the teachers has become more collaborative and colleagial, more focused on investment, than when summative evaluation procedures encouraged teachers to be tight lipped.

Significance through interaction. Despite the relative freedom from supervisory interference one might assume is a part of the self-directed professional development lived-experience, a lack of interaction with supervisors is seen as a major drawback. We have already heard Diane voice her disappointment over her principal's failure to talk with her about her ideas. Marilyn hasn't "seen the process as it stands now as being very interactive. I think the potential is there to have it be a part of what makes me feel like I am a satisfactory teacher." For Ellen conversation with her supervisor provides a level of significance even to the traditional satisfactory-unsatisfactory rating paradigm. The rating itself means little; the conversation is what opens the teacher to meaning making.

How does the lived relation between teachers and supervisors open the way for teachers to view their being-as-teachers differently? How does the lived relation between teacher and supervisor change when teachers engage in self-directed work? What characteristics of the lived relation must be brought forward for teachers to find meaningfulness in their work? This would appear to be an area for further study.

Maintaining a Pedagogic Relationship to the Phenomenon

Van Manen (1990) cautions the educational researcher about three common pitfalls of modern educational theory and research:

> (1) confusing pedagogical theorizing with other discipline-based forms of discourse; (2) tending to abstraction and thus losing touch with the lifeworld of living with children; and (3) failing to see the general erosion of pedagogic meaning from the lifeworld. (p. 135)

His purpose is two-fold. First, as I have experienced in the writing and rewriting of my dissertation chapters, it is so easy to be consumed by the research itself and by all of

the side roads that emerge as the journey unfolds. If not careful, the researcher can become sidetracked and lose sight of the original research interest,

> ...or to wander aimlessly and indulge in wishy-washy speculations, to settle for preconceived opinions and conceptions, to become enchanted by narcissistic reflections of self-indulgent preoccupations, or to fall back onto taxonomic concepts or abstracting theories. (van Manen, 1990, p. 33)

How can I avoid this possibility? Keeping a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon involves a commitment to the phenomenon, an interestedness that keeps the orienting question before me at all times.

Van Manen's second purpose, I believe, speaks to the "So what?" question that can be asked of any research endeavor. Once the phenomenon of teachers' lived experiences of using professional development plans is described, and we have come to some meaningful understanding of the experience, how do I translate that understanding into practice? His discussion of hermeneutic phenomenology as "critically oriented action research" (p. 154) is instructive.

> First, human science is concerned with action in that hermeneutic phenomenological reflection deepens thought and therefore radicalizes thinking and the acting that flows from it....Second, phenomenology is a philosophy of action especially in a pedagogic context. Pedagogy itself is a mode of life that always and by definition deals with practical action....Finally, phenomenology is a philosophy of action always in a personal and situated sense. A person who turns toward phenomenological reflection does so out of personal engagement. (p. 154)

With this perspective in mind, this study will move forward to discover ways in which my teachers and I might translate our newly discovered understanding to act in more pedagogical ways with students. For, in the final analysis, we are educators and our endeavors -- our responsibilities -- must always be carried out with the welfare of our students in mind.

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